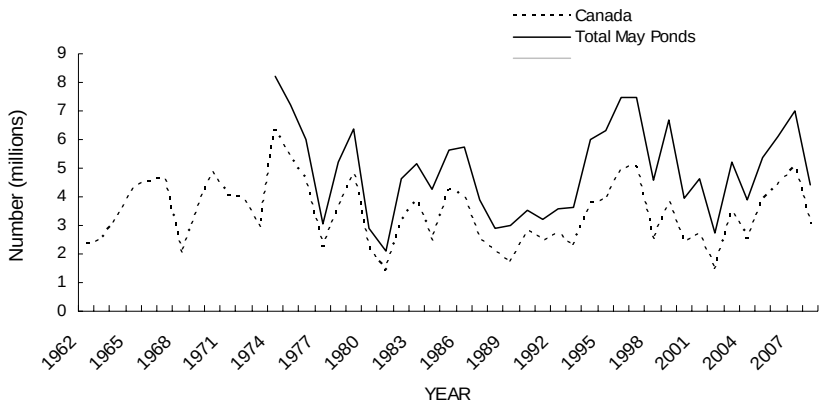
2008 DUCK AND WETLAND STATUS

Each May and July, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) coordinates extensive surveys of waterfowl and wetlands in primary breeding areas of the U.S. and Canada. They have suspended July surveys the past few years due to budgetary constraints, but are scheduled to resume them as funding allows.

2008 Breeding Duck Habitat:

Figure 7. Number of May Ponds in the traditional survey areas of the U.S. and Canada.



Numbers of wetlands, termed "May ponds" reflect habitat conditions for breeding ducks. Following three consecutive years of improved wetland conditions, drought conditions prevailed in many locations during spring 2008. The number of May ponds recorded during spring 2008 totaled 4.4 million, a decline of 37% from the previous year's estimate of 7.0 million. The estimate of ponds in Prairie Canada was 3.1 million, a 39% decrease from the 2007 estimate of 5.0 million. Conditions in the parklands declined from the very wet conditions recorded during 2007, but not to the same degree as in Prairie Canada. Overall, wetland conditions in the parklands were classed as fair to good during 2008. In contrast, most of the U.S. prairies were dry during spring 2008 and conditions were considered fair to poor over most of the area. Parts of southeastern South Dakota and western South Dakota were exceptions due to early May precipitation which recharged temporary and seasonal wetlands. However, the 2008 pond estimate of 1.4 million for the north-central U.S. was 30% below the 2007 estimate. Late spring rains over much of the Dakotas and neighboring states hopefully eased drought conditions and improved the situation for re-nesting and brood rearing. .

Table 4. Percent change in habitat and population indices from 2007 (07) and the long-term average (LTA) among breeding ground regions.

	May Ponds		Breeding Ducks		Mallards	
Region	**vs 07**	**vs LTA**	**vs 07**	**vs LTA**	**vs 07**	**vs LTA**
E. Dakotas	-31%	-16%	-17%	+53%	-24%	+75%
W.Dakotas/MT	-28%	-1%	-30%	-30%	-36%	-30%
S. Alberta	-31%	+15%	-2%	-2%	+5%	-20%
S. Saskatchewan	-46%	-20%	-19%	+20%	-12%	-8%
S. Manitoba	-27%	-12%	-7%	-21%	-2%	0%

Duck Populations:

Below average precipitation in key areas contributed to a decline in total ducks from 41.2 million during 2007 to 37.3 million during 2008. Although the 2008

estimate represents a 9% decline from 2007, it remains 11% above the long-term (1955-2007) average. The decline was greater in the southern prairies (-19% in southern Saskatchewan, -30% in Montana and the western Dakotas, -17% in the Eastern Dakotas), compared with the northern areas (+13% in parts of central and northern Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories, -2% in northern Saskatchewan and northern Manitoba).

Mallard abundance in the traditional survey area (7.7 million) was similar (-7%) to the 2007 estimate of 8.3 million. and the long-term average. Compared to 2007, mallard numbers declined 36% in Montana and the western Dakotas, 24% in the Eastern Dakotas, and 12% in southern Saskatchewan. Species that declined from the previous year include gadwall (-19%), northern shovelers (-23%), canvasbacks (-44%), American wigeon (-11%), and northern pintails (-22%); however, gadwalls and northern shovelers remain above their long-term averages (+56% each) while canvasbacks and northern pintails remain below their long-term averages (-14% and -36%, respectively). Scaup numbers did not change from 2007, but their numbers remain a concern because they are still 27% below their long-term average. Blue-winged and green-winged teal numbers were similar to 2007 and above the long-term average (+45% and +50%, respectively). The estimate for redheads (1.1 million) was also similar to 2007 and 50% above the long-term average.

Mallard Fall Flight:
Projections of the mallard fall flight are based on historic relationships among breeding duck numbers, habitat conditions, adult survival, and expected fall age ratios. The removal, this year, of Alaska mallards from the mid-continent stock did not significantly affect the 2008 breeding population estimate of 7.7 million mid-continent mallards or the fall flight prediction of 9.2 million (10.9 million in 2007).